

Elliott State Forest  
Habitat Conservation Plan EIS

**Public Scoping Meetings – May 2005  
Project Overview**

## **Project Location**

The Elliott State Forest (ESF) encompasses approximately 93,000 acres of state-owned forest lands in Coos and Douglas counties in the Oregon coast range. It lies on a contiguous block of land approximately 18 miles long from north to south, and about 16 miles wide from west to east.

## **Project History and Context**

The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) is preparing to apply for incidental take permits (ITPs) from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) (collectively, the Services), pursuant to section 10(a)(1)(B) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). ODF currently has an ITP and habitat conservation plan (HCP) that cover the potential take of northern spotted owl within the ESF. That HCP has been in place since 1995, and, until October 3, 2001, also included provisions for incidental take of marbled murrelet. With approval of the original HCP, the USFWS issued ODF a 60-year ITP for northern spotted owl and a six-year ITP for the marbled murrelet. The marbled murrelet ITP was for only a six-year period because little was known about the murrelet at that time. As such, part of the HCP strategy called for ODF to fund research on the murrelet that could be used to guide the development of long-term conservation, and support an extended ITP for the species.

As mentioned above, ODF is proposing to revise its existing ITP and HCP in an attempt to reconcile their long-term timber management goals with the protection of at-risk species (both federally listed and unlisted species). Similar to the original HCP, the revised HCP would provide for the conservation needs of the northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet. The revised HCP would also address coho salmon, which was listed as threatened under the ESA subsequent to the preparation of the original HCP. Incidental take permits would be reviewed by the Services and issued for take of these three species resulting from the removal or alteration of habitat in the course of forest management activities. In addition, the revised HCP proposes to address the conservation needs of 22 other species that are not currently listed as threatened or endangered under the federal ESA. In the future, if the population status changes for any of these species such that they do become listed, they would automatically be added to the ITP, and ODF would be granted incidental take authorization.

The federal issuance of an ITP has the potential to significantly affect the human environment and is therefore subject to review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). As part of that review, the Services are required to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) and circulate it along with the HCP document for public review. This public scoping period marks the beginning of the EIS process.

## **Common School Forest Lands**

Of the Elliott State Forest lands, 91 percent are Common School Forest Lands, which are owned by the State Land Board. Oregon's constitution states that these lands must be managed for the

greatest benefit for the people of the State of Oregon, consistent with the conservation of the resource under sound techniques of land management. Oregon's attorney general has concluded that the "greatest benefit for the people" is to use the land for schools and the production of income for the Common School Fund. The remaining lands are Board of Forestry Lands, which also must be managed to secure the greatest permanent value to the citizens of Oregon. Inherent in the multiple objectives and legal requirements for these lands are conflicts between maximizing economic return and protecting environmental and social values. The HCP being prepared by ODF, seeks a balance between these conflicting economic and environmental needs and requirements while minimizing incidental take of species.

## Proposed Action

The ESF EIS will examine the proposed approval of the ESF HCP, and issuance of an ITP to ODF. Activities that ODF is currently considering to propose for ITP coverage, and for which minimization and mitigation measures are being developed, include the following:

- Mechanized timber harvest;
- Forest product transportation;
- Road and landing construction, use, maintenance, and abandonment;
- Harvest-site preparation (excluding use of herbicides);
- Tree planting;
- Fertilizer application;
- Silvicultural practices;
- Fire suppression;
- Aquatic habitat restoration;
- Rock pit activities; and
- Other management activities, including vertebrate control and harvesting of minor forest products.

The HCP will describe the impacts of the proposed action on listed species and will propose a conservation strategy to minimize and mitigate those impacts to the maximum extent practicable. This conservation strategy is expected to include the following components:

- Maintenance of a diverse range of forest stand structures;
- Designation of conservation areas to protect special resources, including sites used by owls and murrelets;
- A landscape design that provides functional habitat for native species;
- Maintenance of structural habitat components throughout the forest;
- Stream protection buffers;
- A forest road program;
- A monitoring and adaptive management program; and
- Aquatic habitat restoration measures.

## Alternatives

Alternatives evaluated in the EIS will reflect information presented in the HCP and have not been finalized yet.